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GAP IN THE DEFENSE SETUP

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Weaknesses at the top of our defense setup have been underscored before the Senate Preparedness subcommittee by two witnesses who command the country's attention and respect.

One of these is Gen Jimmy Doolittle, pioneer in military aviation and national hero; the other, Dr. Vandever Bush, former head of the Research and Development Board. Both see substantially the same situation, but their suggestions for correcting it differ somewhat.

That the setup established by the National Security Act should need some revision is not surprising. It was a new and experimental departure when the law was enacted 10 years ago. In the decade since, the country has experienced the cold war and the Korean conflict; also, the hydrogen bomb and now the intercontinental ballistic missile have emerged.

The act placed the three armed services for the first time under one head, the Secretary of Defense. It also established the National Security Council to advise the President on over-all policy. In this are represented not only the military, but also such civilian departments as State, Agriculture, Treasury and others. The Central Intelligence Agency is subject to this body.

* * *

In addition, the National Security Act created the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Though this drew on experience in World War II, it was highly experimental as a permanent peacetime institution. What the country sought to avoid—and very wisely—was anything resembling the Prussian type of single "Greater" Staff, which might eventually cause the armed services to dominate national policy.

The three chiefs of staff—Army, Navy and Air Force—were set up as a committee, with a strictly limited number of officer personnel subject to them. They

were even denied a chairman at first, but this was added later.

By and large, the Joint Chiefs have kept their place; the staff directly subject to them has not been expanded. The difficulty has been that this body has become a tiny representative assembly of three services which are traditional rivals and compete annually for appropriations.

Each member of the Joint Chiefs has thought too often of his own service and its needs, and too seldom of national defense as a whole. Jimmy Doolittle and Dr. Bush agree that this has hurt over-all planning within the Defense Department. Dr. Bush ridiculed the idea that this is the job of the National Security Council, since that body must concern itself with all phases of national policy.

What is lacking is unified planning in the narrower area of military, naval and air problems.

Dr. Bush favors a National Planning Council, made up largely of officers who have retired or are about to retire. These could not be paralyzed by their own services for taking a broad view.

But older men would be less likely to plan in step with the times than the young, progressive officers whom Gen Doolittle would place on a planning staff to advise the Defense Secretary. The general also believes we must eventually have an integrated "Greater" Staff. He does not fear military domination by civilian authority because of the nature of American professional soldiers for war.

What would be safe if all officers could be guaranteed to be Jimmy Doolittles now and in the future. It is not necessary to agree with him in this to recognize that he and Dr. Bush have spotted the dangerous gap in our defense setup, and have made useful and constructive suggestions toward plugging it.

—VINCE SMITH